



Bureau of Indian Affairs–National Interagency Fire Center
Division of Forestry and Wildland Fire Management
Eliza Morris Fuels Management Project - Success Story



Picture 1: Firefighters conduct broadcast prescribed fire across entire unit in 2013.

Seminole, Oklahoma - The Wewoka Agency is in its sixth year working to remove Eastern Red Cedar from the 58 acre Eliza Morris unit, located on restricted Indian land within the Wewoka Agency protection. When complete, the unit will be free of Eastern Red Cedar (ERC) trees and will again look like a natural prairie.

Three phases have taken place so far to restore the Eliza Morris unit. From 2009-2010, a mechanical treatment removed the densely populated ERC that had invaded the natural prairie grass. In 2011, debris piles created from the mechanical treatment were burned, which then allowed firefighters to safely conduct a larger prescribed fire across the entire unit in 2013.

Small saplings of Eastern Red Cedar began to rejuvenate following the 2010 mechanical treatment. To prevent this re-growth and to enhance the natural regeneration of the native prairie grasses, a second prescribed fire took place in February 2015. While the unit has undergone extensive treatments, additional mechanical and prescribed fire treatments are scheduled to remove the remaining pockets of Eastern Red Cedar that persists.

Originally planted as a windbreak around homes or as ornamentals, the encroaching Eastern Red Cedar is now considered an invasive and undesirable species due to its volatile oils that can easily ignite and burn quickly. It also destroys the natural prairie and savanna ecosystems native to the Oklahoma landscape.

For landscapes that evolved with fire, such as Oklahoma's savanna and prairie ecosystems, maintaining a more natural savanna and prairie condition will require the safe application of fire over time. Research has shown that when consistently applied to these landscapes, fire acts as a natural agent that controls the spread of insect and diseases and reduces the encroachment of unwanted woody plants. Prescribe fire is also the most cost effective method to remove and manage the encroaching species.

Given the proximity to homes and a community park, the Eliza Morris unit, when fully restored to its more native conditions, will provide many benefits to the community. One benefit is the defensible space which firefighters can use to safely and quickly respond to a wildland fire.



Picture 2: Prescribe fire across unit in 2015